

Slaughter Offers Amendment to Protect Victims of Sexual Assault in the Military

Ranking Democrat Offers Important Amendment to Defense Authorization Bill

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Rules, today offered an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill that would provide funding for training, services and resources for soldiers serving as first responders in sexual assault cases. The measure would go a long way towards protecting victims of sexual assault who serve in the military. It will be considered enbloc and is expected to pass later this afternoon.

Earlier this month, the Department of Defense released their first annual report to Congress on sexual assault in the military. And, I'm afraid, the findings were not good. Of the 1,275 cases of sexual assault among service members, only 113 cases resulted in a court martial. More discouraging is the fact that 278 cases were not pursued because the perpetrator could not be identified. And, another 351 cases were not pursued because of unsubstantiated or insufficient evidence. This amounts to 629 sexual assault cases, nearly 50 percent of those reported, where the perpetrator is still out there, free to commit further assaults.

“Surely the Department of Defense can and needs to do a better job of training new and existing first responders to respond to sexual assaults occurring in the military,” said Rep. Slaughter. She continued, **“Criminal investigators, medical professionals, and victims advocates all need to be trained on gathering, protecting, and processing evidence.”**

Last March, service women spoke before the Congressional Women's Caucus about the inability of some military healthcare facilities to appropriately care for women who had been sexually assaulted. In some areas, medical providers are not familiar with the gathering and processing of rape kits. More dismaying, some facilities are not even equipped with rape kits. With great emotion, these service women recounted the military's failure to provide them with a private examination or tests for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

“We cannot allow women to be victimized once by their perpetrator and then again by the lack of appropriate, compassionate care at military healthcare facilities,” said Rep. Slaughter.

Rep. Slaughter's amendment seeks to prevent women in uniform from experiencing this egregious treatment. It requires the Secretary of Defense to assess the training and resource gaps, which have prevented victims of sexual assault in the military from receiving the best possible care. Based on this assessment, Slaughter's amendment also requires the Secretary to develop a plan to address these gaps by enhancing the accessibility and availability of supplies and trained personnel by military victims of sexual assault.

“Women in the armed services put themselves in harms way to protect us and our nation from threats at home and abroad. The least we can do is ensure that they are protected when facing a horrible tragedy,” concluded Rep. Slaughter.